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SUBJECT: SOMALIA - DEBATE CONTINUES OVER SOMALILAND ELECTION

REF: NAIROBI 1772

¶1. (SBU) Summary: As Somaliland's political crisis continues, major disagreements remain between the Somaliland government and opposition parties. Still at issue are the voter registration list, the possible postponement of the elections, currently scheduled for September 27, and the nature of a caretaker government should elections be postponed. On August 20, thousands of demonstrators from the two opposition parties protested peacefully in all six regions of the self-declared Somaliland republic, despite attempts by police to stop them (reftel). In an effort to mediate, Ethiopia dispatched a delegation to Hargeisa. Negotiations resulted in a &Non-Paper on the Upcoming Election in Somaliland,8 which was issued on August 22, and claimed to outline an agreement between the ruling party UDUB, and the two opposition parties, Kulmiye and UCID. However, on August 23, Kulmiye and UCID issued a strongly worded letter in which they rejected the Riyale Administration's proposals to a) postpone the election (which has already been delayed three times), b) extend the President's term, and c) retain four of the current election Commissioners. The leaders of the two opposition parties appear to have very different views on the progress made by the Ethiopian-led mediation. Embassy believes that premature international community support for the Ethiopian-led effort might pressure the opposition parties into accepting a settlement which appears at this juncture to unduly favor the incumbent President and his party. End summary.

Ethiopian Mediation Efforts and the "Non-Paper"

¶2. (SBU) An Ethiopian delegation led by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Tekeda Alemu visited Hargeisa from August 19 - 23, in an attempt to break the impasse between the Somaliland government and opposition parties. As a result of the Ethiopian-led efforts, a &Non-Paper on the Upcoming Election in Somaliland8 was issued in Hargeisa. The non-paper claimed to outline a number of points agreed upon "in principle" after extensive consultations with the Ethiopians, and to a lesser extent British government representatives in Hargeisa. The non-paper was intended to form the basis of an agreement and a future Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the ruling party UDUB and the two opposition parties, Kulmiye and UCID. The non-paper appeared to decidedly favor the Government's position. It proposed postponing the election (currently scheduled for September 27), extending the terms of office of the President and Vice President, and "revisiting" rather than "revoking" the National Electoral Commission (NEC) decision on the voter registration list. In the past none of these proposals has been acceptable to the opposition.

13. (SBU) In an August 23 joint letter, both opposition parties rejected the Government proposals to a) postpone the election, b) extend the President's term, and c) retain the current election Commissioners. The opposition parties in the letter insisted that if elections were delayed beyond September 27, a "caretaker" government should take responsibility until elections could be held. Observers are certain that President Riyale would certainly reject this, as he has consistently maneuvered to remain in power.

14. (SBU) On August 27, we learned that opposition leaders Ahmed Mohamed "Silanyo" (Chairman of Kulmiye) and Faisal Ali Warabe (Chairman of UCID), planned to issue a second joint letter which we expect to receive shortly. The second letter was reportedly intended to clarify the current position of the opposition on the Ethiopian mediation and the non-paper. "Silanyo" and Warabe told us that the second letter would emphatically reject any extension of the President's and Vice President's terms and insist, as earlier agreed by all three parties, on the removal of four members of the NEC.

15. (SBU) Although the proposed joint second letter as previewed by the opposition parties was to hew to the same hard line, the two major opposition party leaders in a subsequent, August 28 conversation nevertheless appeared to have different views on the progress made during the Ethiopian mediation. "Silanyo" told us that the negotiation was a failure and voiced deep frustration with Ethiopian mediation efforts, and especially with Tekeda, who he said

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was adamant that the President and Vice President remain in power in the interests of stability. Warabe, who talked with us just one hour earlier, appeared more optimistic. Confusingly in light of the proposed second letter, he told us that he felt the negotiations initiated by the Ethiopians were proceeding in a positive manner. Warabe admitted that the Kulmiye party remained less optimistic, but he believed that if an interim national unity government were formed with ministers from the opposition, he would be able to persuade "Silanyo" and his party to sign an agreement.

Comment and Way Forward

16. (SBU) There are several significant concerns with the Ethiopian non-paper. It appears that the non-paper, at least in its current form, is not supported by the two Somaliland opposition parties. Even if a degree of buy-in were to emerge, which would likely require concessions on points vital to the opposition, the next steps are problematic, and could derail the mediation efforts. The Ethiopian delegation reportedly plans to return to Hargeisa in early September to develop the non-paper into a MOU. While the Ethiopian diplomatic endeavor was initially welcomed by all parties, we note that developing the degree of detail needed for an MOU would be a significant challenge and would inevitably raise controversial issues that have been glossed over in the non-paper. Second, we noted that the non-paper is very general on a number of key points, including the way forward for the voter registration list and the appointment of an unspecified "expert body" to address voter registration. We are concerned that the non-paper's vagueness could be exploited by President Riyale's government in order to attain its own objectives. Finally, selecting a mutually agreed upon election date will likely be tricky if the September 27 elections are delayed.

17. (SBU) On August 27, the Embassy delivered a letter to President Riyale from Assistant Secretary Carson, which highlighted USG concern with the NEC's decision not to use the internationally-funded voter registration lists. The letter also condemned the Riyale Administration's

heavy-handed treatment of the press. Somalia Unit has continued to push the Somaliland government to agree to a long-delayed call between Somaliland President Riyale and a high-level Department representative. Riyale,s staff, however, continues to delay, citing a long-promised, "pending" letter from their Foreign Minister which in their view must be received by the USG before any conversation can take place. PDAS Carter conducted an interview with Horn Cable TV during the week of August 17 which increased pressure on President Riyale.

18. (SBU) Ethiopia and other involved parties are likely trying to gauge the degree of international support for their mediation efforts. The media reported that the African Union's envoy arrived in Hargeisa on August 25, and planned to meet with representatives of all political parties. We believe that premature international community support for the Ethiopian-led effort might pressure the opposition parties into accepting a settlement which appears at this juncture to unduly favor the incumbent President and his party.

RANNEBERGER